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*Testimony of Heather Paul, Ph.D.
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*House Commerce Committee
Subcommittee on Telecommunications, Trade and Consumer Protection
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Good afternoon. My name is Heather Paul and I am the Executive Director of the National SAFE KIDS Campaign. The National SAFE KIDS Campaign is a grassroots-based organization dedicated to the prevention of unintentional childhood injury. Because the Campaign spends so much of its time protecting children from motor vehicle-related death and injury, we are uniquely qualified to speak to the confusion parents, grandparents and caregivers have regarding the safe transportation of children. The Campaign has more than 220 state and local offices across the country. Our Coalitions organize and implement child safety seat checks where they help well-intentioned but uninformed and frustrated parents install their child safety seats properly. It is at these events that we have found that the vast majority of parents are not transporting their children safely. This problem stems from four basic issues:

1. Parents do not know which type of car seat is appropriate for their child;
2. Parents do not know how to properly secure their child in the car seat;
3. Parents do not know how to properly anchor the seat inside the car; and
4. Parents do not know which seating position is most appropriate for the safety seat.

Parents, grandparents and caregivers are faced every day with the difficult task of properly installing their child safety seats. There is a lot of information to know. Did you know that if your safety belt has a free-sliding latchplate with emergency locking retractor, then you must use a locking clip to properly install your car seat? Or that if your safety belt is a lap belt only with an emergency locking retractor, then you must use a belt-shortening heavy duty locking clip which needs to be specially ordered from a dealership?

It is no wonder that we discover at child safety seat checks across the country that almost every seat is improperly installed. Given this widespread misuse, it is no surprise that there are nearly 1,500 deaths and 280,000 injuries annually to children riding as passengers in motor vehicles. These motor vehicle-related deaths and injuries, including the deaths and injuries associated with air bag deployment, are certainly tragic. They have, however, focused

our collective attention on things we know work. The Campaign realizes that the pending standardized child safety seat rule-making before NHTSA and developing "smart air bag" technology will go a long way to protect children. These initiatives, however, will not be implemented until some time after the year 2000 and they will not be fully incorporated into the automobile fleet until well after that. The Campaign is here today to educate the Subcommittee and the driving public that there are things we can do today to protect our children.

#1 We must get information and "know how" to the grassroots level where it really makes a difference -- The most important thing we can do is to educate parents about car seat use, help them with decision-making on appropriate car seat selection and teach them how to properly install the car seat itself. Brochures, pamphlets, public service announcements and media campaigns are important components, but there is no substitution for "hands-on", individual training. To this end, the National SAFE KIDS Campaign has partnered with General Motors to implement a program called "SAFE KIDS BUCKLE UP". The program will not only distribute child passenger safety information through 6 national health and education organizations, but will also teach parents on an individual basis how to install their car seat in cars -- all cars, not just General Motors cars. Through partnerships with our Coalition network, General Motors dealerships across the country will serve as distributors of education materials; GM dealership employees will be trained to answer basic questions about passenger safety; and, most importantly, GM Dealerships will team up with SAFE KIDS Coalitions nationwide to coordinate "Car Seat Check Up" events. We know that this program will make a difference.

#2 Congress should pass the Child Passenger Safety Act (H.R. 784) -- The Federal government has a role in helping to get information and technical "know how" down to the grassroots level where it counts. Now pending before Congress is the Child Passenger Safety Act. Authored and sponsored by Congresswoman Connie Morella and Congressman Steny Hoyer, this bill would provide \$7.5 million in Fiscal Years 1998 and 1999 to the Department of Transportation for the purpose of funding education and training grants to organizations that educate parents about the correct installation of car seats. SAFE KIDS urges you to support this important initiative.

#3 Each state should close gaps in existing child occupant protection laws and effectively enforce those laws: Congress should urge the states to do so -- Effective enforcement of comprehensive child occupant protection laws is one of the best ways to increase usage rates for safety seats. Many existing child restraint and safety belt laws are deficient, leaving children unprotected. Existing laws should be strengthened to more uniformly protect our children.

State legislatures across the country should look to their own laws to determine if improvements are needed. Congress has a role here also. I encourage each member of this Subcommittee to contact their Governor to express support for these gap-closing measures and to express support for effective enforcement. Additionally, Congress should support and improve upon the President's recently announced Seat Belt Initiative. The President's plan provides for incentive grants to those states that pass primary enforcement seat belt laws. A similar grant program should be crafted for those states that improve their child safety seat laws.

#4 Child safety seats should be made available to low-income families -- It is critical to get safety seats in the hands of those who can't afford them. Governments could help achieve this goal if the purchase of safety seats were reimbursed through public assistance programs. Private industry can also help by offering discount and loaner seat programs. In addition to saving lives and preventing injuries, such programs would also save money. The total annual cost of motor vehicle-related deaths and injuries for children ages 4 and under exceeds \$7.9 billion. Among children hospitalized for motor vehicle-related injuries, those unrestrained or improperly restrained are more severely injured and incur 60 to 70 percent greater hospital costs. By making **child** safety seats more readily available, we can expect dramatic decreases in health care expenditures.

In all our contacts with parents and grandparents, we have never met one that didn't love their child or care about their child's safety. We do meet parents on a daily basis who are confused by the **difficulty** of determining the appropriate safety seat for their child and by the complexity of installing that seat properly. I have highlighted several points that we know will help parents in their efforts to protect their children. We all have a role in this effort. The Campaign is, of course, available to assist this Subcommittee in any fashion. Thank you.



AIR BAG SAFETY: BUCKLE EVERYONE! CHILDREN IN BACK!

STATEMENT

BEFORE THE

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON TELECOMMUNICATIONS,

TRADE AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

BY

JANET DEWY

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

AIR BAG SAFETY CAMPAIGN

April 28, 1997

Thank you for the opportunity to **testify** before this committee. The complex issues regarding air bags can be **summarized** into three basic **areas** -- regulatory, technological and **behavioral**. The focus of the Air Bag Safety Campaign is on the behavioral issues relating to air bag safety.

The Campaign under the auspices of the National Safety Council, is a public/private **partnership** of domestic and international automobile manufacturers, seven of the leading U.S. insurance companies, **occupant restraint** manufacturers, government agencies, and health and safety organizations. The goal of the Campaign is to **maximize** the benefits and **minimize** the risks associated with air bags.

More than 1800 lives have been saved by air bags since 1986. These ~~teal~~ people - moms, dads, **grandparents** -- ~~are~~ alive today because for many, the combination of their safety belt and air bags kept them safe in a serious crash. However, 63 air bag related deaths have been confirmed since 1990. There ~~are~~ for the most part clear patterns to the injuries and fatalities. Consequently, there are distinct behavioral changes we must make. The recommended basic safety steps include:

- Always wear **safety** belts **properly** using both lap and shoulder belts where available.
- Sit as far away from the steering wheel as **practical**. Maintain 10-12 inches from the steering wheel hub to the chest whenever possible.
- **Children** age 12 and under should ride properly buckled **up** in rear seats in child safety seats or safety belts appropriate for their age and size.
- Infants should NEVER ride in the **front** seats of a vehicle with a passenger side air bag.
- For pregnant women place the lap portion of the safety belt under the abdomen as low as possible on the hips and across the upper thighs.

Following these simple safety steps are the most immediate actions the public can take to **reduce** potential air bag related injuries. The necessity of **behavioral** changes is even more critical given the knowledge that according to National Highway **Traffic Safety** Administration (NHTSA) investigations, 34 of the 38 children killed in crashes

involving deploying air bags were either completely unbuckled or were placed in **infant** seats in **front** of passenger side air bags. It should be noted that these basic safety steps will help **reduce** injuries in crashes whether or not the vehicle is **equipped** with air bags.

The challenge to change basic behavior and deeply **engrained** habits is **great**, but there are encouraging signs for **real** progress over the next few months and years. **Recently**, Secretary of Transportation **Slater** announced a plan by President Clinton to **increase** safety belt **use** in **America** from 68% to 85% and to **reduce** child occupant fatalities by 15%. The time **frame** for these goals is by the year 2000, only 33 months away. In addition, the National Governors Association and the U.S. Conference of Mayors have passed Air Bag Safety Campaign-sponsored resolutions to increase safety belt and child safety seat use. Most **important**, the public has voiced great support for upgraded child passenger **safety** and safety belt laws and for high visibility enforcement of these laws.

The goals established by the President are ambitious. It will take hard work and strong leadership, along with the right mix of incentives and perhaps disincentives to increase safety belt use at the state and national levels so that we reduce avoidable crash related injuries. But, the work has **already** begun. Through *Operation ABC: Mobilizing America to Buckle Up Children*, the Campaign **working** with law enforcement agencies across the country and the **National Highway Traffic Safety Administration** will spearheading a nation effort of unprecedented proportions to make *unbuckled children are unacceptable in America*. President Clinton, **governors**, mayors and others have pledged their support for this effort.

Our main obstacle seems to be that people today are not looking for more things for government to do. To a vocal minority, upgraded safety laws and enforcement seems **like** unwelcomed government intervention. But, the human and **fiscal** costs of crashes affects us all either directly through the loss of loved ones or indirectly through social, insurance and other taxpayer costs. In fact, **traffic** crashes **cost** this nation a staggering \$150.5 billion every year. Reaching 85% belt use would, **according** to **NHTSA**, save almost 4,200 lives, avert over **100,000** injuries, and save \$6.7 billion annually.

Up to **sixty percent** of those involved in **fatal crashes** not buckled up. There are 34 million **current** technology air bag equipped vehicles on the road today. We have neither the time nor the **resources** to spend on “feel good” activities. **These programs**, along with state legislation, have gotten us to the current belt use level of 68 percent. However, safety belt use has increased only minimally over the past few years. Clearly, more must be done to reach the over 30 percent of Americans who never buckle up and the **significant number** of people **who** only **sometimes** buckle up.

The Campaign has designed a three-point strategy to reach these goals. Similar to President Clinton’s belt use plan, the action **areas** are to **Educate**, to **Enact**, and to **Enforce**.

EDUCATE

According to the Campaign’s **research**, awareness of the risks air bags may pose is at 80-90 percent – nearly universal. The Campaign has **spread** the ***Air bag safety: Buckle everyone! Children in back!*** message to more than 175 million people since June 1996. On an ongoing basis, this message is reaching millions **through** news articles, editorials, **radio** and television programs at both the national and local levels. We have **distributed** more **than** 20 million educational flyers with the **safety** tips and basic graphics indicating the “NO!” position for **transporting** children

Our outreach efforts are designed to reach the public so that they **receive** our **safety** message **from** the newspaper, on **milk** cartons, in flyers in their paychecks, in their company’s **newsletters**, in the stores in which they shop, on the **products** they buy, **from** their health care providers, and even at sporting events they attend. To accomplish this level of outreach we have established partnerships **with** the American Association of Family Physicians, American Association of Health Plans, Jiffy Lube **International**, Johnson & Johnson, Avis, Giant Foods, Century and Evenflo, Delta and American Airlines, Major League Baseball and more than 150 additional corporations and associations across the country.

While we have seen positive results **from** the combined educational efforts over the past year, public education alone is simply not enough to **increase** safety belt and child safety seat **use** for many people. **Take** a few tragic examples – in

December and January ~~three~~ young children riding completely ~~unrestrained~~ on the laps of front seat passengers died in air bag related ~~crashes~~. Just two weeks ago, a two and a half year old ~~reportedly~~ died under the same ~~tragic circumstances~~, the first reported air bag ~~related~~ child fatality since January of this year.

While we till continue our focused educational efforts, we must move forward to ~~strengthen~~ enforcement of existing laws.

ENFORCE

Highly visible enforcement including citations is the critical and necessary next step to make unbuckled *children unacceptable in this country*. North Carolina's *Click It or Ticket It* campaign increased belt use from 64 to 82 percent, Stepped up enforcement has ~~resulted~~ in high belt use in several other states including California, Washington and Oregon.

The Air Bag Safety Campaign will partner ~~with~~ seven states over the next 18 months to implement extensive, high visibility ~~enforcement~~ programs according to the "Special ~~Traffic Enforcement Programs~~" or "STEP" model. These states are Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, New Mexico, North ~~Carolina~~, South Carolina and Virginia It is our belief that model ~~programs~~ developed ~~through~~ these partnerships ~~will result in~~ significant ~~progress toward~~ the President's national belt use and child passenger safety goals.

Also, the Campaign is urging law enforcement agencies to upgrade high visibility safety belt and child passenger ~~safety~~ enforcement efforts. During *Operation ABC: Mobilizing America to Buckle Up Children* tens of thousands of officers ~~representing~~ state police agencies and more than 500 municipal police agencies in all 50 states and the District of Columbia will get the *unbuckled children are unacceptable* message out ~~across~~ America,

To give ~~further~~ support to law enforcement, the Campaign has begun an ~~18-month~~ project with the ~~International~~ Association of Chiefs of Police to train law enforcement officers ~~around~~ the ~~country~~ on child passenger ~~safety~~. The goal

of this training is to increase enforcement of existing **laws** by making certain that officers understand the basics of transporting children safely including the **correct** installation of child safety seats.

ENACT

Enforceable and effective safety belt and child passenger safety laws are critical. Forty-nine states have mandatory **safety** belt laws; however, as of December 31, 1996, only 11 states allow regular enforcement -- that is **enforcement** and ticketing the same as any other traffic violation. These laws are **referred** to as "standard" or "primary" enforcement safety belt laws. In the **remaining** 38 states with "secondary" safety belt laws, a person must be stopped under another violation **before** they can be ticketed for a seat belt violation. Every state has a separate child passenger safety provision or law which can be **enforced** on a standard basis right now.

Rather than protect children "secondary" safety belt laws may actually put children and teenagers covered by **these** laws at risk. In a **secondary** law state, even if a police officer sees an unbuckled child in the front seat of a vehicle hanging out of the window or hugging the dashboard (in eminent danger should the air bag deploy), the officer cannot stop the vehicle and take the child out of danger unless the driver **first runs a red light**, speeds, or violates some other **traffic** law.

Belt use rates in the 40 and 50 percent range in more than 15 states with weaker safety belt laws point out the **facts** that many people simply do not take seriously these laws or the risks those riding unbuckled face. And often, **if the** driver of a vehicle is not buckled up, children in the vehicle may not be buckled up as well. These children pay a **stiff price** with their health and **future**.

Before I moved to Washington, D.C. to direct the Air Bag Safety Campaign I worked in **Louisiana** to **increase** safety belt and child safety seat use in that state. While some **people** may naively claim that **safety** belt use is best decided by individuals, **real life** events convinced a majority of legislators in Louisiana that safety belt use is a public health issue and simply must be taken seriously. During a 60-day period in the spring of 1995, 13 young people died in **traffic** crashes after they were thrown **from** their vehicle. We survived our high risk years but these youths and thousands more across

our country do not survive ~~these~~ crashes and will continue to be ejected in serious crashes until they buckle up under ~~standard~~ safety belt laws. We owe it to our young people to give them a serious message about the number one cause of death to children and teens.

The effectiveness of upgraded laws in ~~improving overall~~ child and family safety was ~~demonstrated~~ in Louisiana when their stronger belt law resulted in a 26% ~~increase~~ in safety belt use and an ~~amazing~~ 82% child safety seat use without any ~~actual~~ changes in the child passenger safety statute.

Right now legislators across the ~~country~~ are right now considering bills to upgrade safety belt and child restraint laws, Maryland will soon ~~be~~ added to the list of standard enforcement states and Oklahoma is one ~~step~~ away ~~from~~ sending a standard enforcement safety belt bill to the governor's desk. The Air Bag Safety Campaign is providing ~~various~~ levels of financial assistance, information, ~~coordination~~ and/or other support to individuals and groups in many states. It will take ~~all~~ of our collective efforts help ~~state~~ legislators and governors understand ~~these~~ issues and support upgraded safety laws.

The Air Bag Safety Campaign will continue to educate, to work for enactment of stronger safety belt and child safety seat laws and to support high visibility enforcement of ~~these~~ laws. Crashes ~~are~~ predictable but most serious injuries are preventable and children simply don't deserve the outcomes of risky situations that adults either knowingly or unknowingly place them.

As a newspaper in Ruston, Louisiana said in a 1995 editorial in support of a standard safety belt law, "It isn't ~~often~~ that our ~~state government~~ is able to make such a ~~difference~~ in the lives of its citizens." The same ~~sentiment~~ applies today to federal as well as state ~~governments~~. We simply must use ~~all~~ of our best ~~resources~~ to make *Unbuckled Children Unacceptable in America*, and to remember that – *Air bag safety means: Buckle everyone! Children in back!*